

Water Resources Management in Federal Agencies

A number of agencies and departments within the Executive Branch administer water projects and enforce water laws. There has traditionally been tension between the two main agencies responsible for constructing large water projects. Competition between the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers for Congressional authorizations for dam construction characterized relations between these two main water project construction agencies in the 20th Century. There is also tension between the agencies responsible for enforcing environmental laws (such as the “Endangered Species Act”) and the agencies charged with providing freshwater through construction projects. As you can see from the following list of some of the agencies involved in solving water problems, many Executive agencies participate in water management. Unfortunately, coordination between these many programs on the national level is lacking.

Department of the Interior

Bureau of Reclamation: The Bureau of Reclamation is charged with providing water for irrigation in 17 western states. A number of Bureau projects are also designed to provide hydroelectric power and recreation in addition to their irrigation objectives. The Bureau also manages some municipal and industrial water supply facilities when part of larger multi-purpose reclamation projects. In the past decade, the Bureau has expanded to create wastewater reuse and recycling programs. Historically, projects are built with federal funds that must be repaid over time. Projects typically require individual authorizations from Congress.

U.S. Geological Survey: Hydrologists working for the Geological Survey provide technical data and research to assist other agencies in managing the United States’ water resources. Geological Survey responsibilities include recording the quantity, quality, and use of our nation’s water resources.

Fish and Wildlife Service: Responsible for managing 93 million acres of public lands, the Fish and Wildlife Service aims to protect and improve fish and wildlife habitats. The Fish and Wildlife Service also manages rivers protected under the “Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.”

Department of Defense

Army Corps of Engineers: The main objectives of the Army Corps’ civil works projects include flood control and inland navigation, although hydropower, recreation, and fish and wildlife benefits have grown in importance over the past decades. Army Corps’ projects store

and supply water for municipal and industrial purposes as well; however, the Army Corps' role in planning for such uses is secondary. Army Corps projects generally require specific authorizations from Congress. The "Water Resources Development Act of 1986" significantly increased local cost-share requirements for Army Corps projects.

Department of Agriculture

Rural Utilities Service: USDA water projects cater to rural areas. The Rural Utilities Service provides grants and loans for the installation or expansion of rural water and waste disposal facilities. Additionally, the Rural Utilities Service administers the "Water 2000 Initiative," designed to bring safe, affordable drinking water to all rural areas by 2000.

Natural Resources Conservation Service, Small Watershed Program: This program assists communities in preventing erosion and sedimentation for flood control purposes. Furthermore, the Small Watershed Program aims to conserve and develop land and water resources in watershed areas, and to promote sustainable use of our natural resources.

Natural Resources Conservation Service, Wetland Reserve Program: The Wetlands Reserve Program is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts. The NRCS goal is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. This program offers landowners an opportunity to establish long-term conservation and wildlife practices and protection beyond that which can be obtained through any other USDA program.

Environmental Protection Agency

Office of Water: The EPA's Office of Water works to ensure that "all Americans will have drinking water that is clean and safe to drink." The programs under this office also aim to protect our rivers, lakes, wetlands, aquifers, and coastal waters. Preventing pollution of our water supplies is the focal point of the EPA's water programs.

Clean Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program and Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund Program: Through these two programs, financial assistance is provided to local officials to ensure that all communities have access to clean drinking water and to ensure that waste is properly treated before its release into surface waters.

The Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds: The Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds (OWOW) promotes a watershed approach to manage, protect, and restore the water resources and aquatic ecosystems of our marine and fresh waters. This strategy is based on the premise that water quality and ecosystem problems are best solved at the watershed level and that local citizens play an integral role in achieving clean water goals. Through its many programs, OWOW provides technical and financial assistance and develops regulations and guidance to support the watershed approach.

Department of Housing and Urban Development

Community Development Block Grants: These grants may be used for a variety of projects, including clean water and waste treatment, to ensure decent housing in urban areas.

Department of Commerce

Economic Development Administration: Authorized to provide development assistance, economic development grants are available for water and sewer projects through the Economic Development Administration's **Public Works and Development Facilities Program**.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: Responsible for conserving and managing the United States' coastal and marine resources, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration works to promote safe navigation, build sustainable fisheries, and sustain healthy coastal ecosystems.

Department of State

International Boundary and Water Commission: Officials in the State Department work to resolve issues regarding water shared over the borders between the United States, Canada, and Mexico.